

Teaching Wearing a Mask

Some children will naturally see other people wearing masks, put it right on and keep it on; others will put it on initially, but the novelty will wear off; others will need to be specifically taught how to wear a mask and keep it on. Here are some ideas for parents who would like to work on this with their children.

The “Prep” Work!

The first steps are mostly about exposure to masks and preparing the child for wearing a mask in the future.

- For student who can understand, talk about the importance of wearing a mask and keeping people safe.
- Read a social story to your child to help them understand. Here are links to two different ones but there are many different ones you can find online:
https://youtu.be/InP-uMn6g_U
<https://youtu.be/lgaKLpSxQag>
- Here’s a link to a song about wearing a mask:
<https://youtu.be/a9QTxUklE0w>
- Try to find pictures of videos or your child’s favorite tv or book characters or even famous people, wearing masks. This might encourage them to want to wear a mask.
- Create your own little book about people in the child’s life wearing masks (i.e. family, teachers, friends, etc.) You can also make little masks for toys/stuffed animals and take pictures of them for the book. Your child can help be part of this process by helping to make little masks (out of paper or napkins) for the stuffed animals/toys!
- If you child is very resistant to the mask, have other members of the family wear masks at home so the child can see it.
- Have the child help pick out his/her own masks. Whether you are making them or buying them, the child can be part of the process!

The “Teaching” part!

After exposure, start working on teaching the child to wear a mask and keep it on for a certain amount of time.

- Depending on your child’s age and level of understanding, decide whether you are going to teach your child to put on and take off his/her own mask or if you want the child to be dependent on the adult putting it on and taking it off. This is an important decision!

Is your child at an age or level of understanding to know when they can and can't take the mask off or to know to ask first? If not, consider that an adult puts the mask on and takes the mask off each time.

- Start by expecting the child to wear the mask for a short amount of time and gradually increase the amount of time expected. A timer can be used if it is helpful!
- Begin by putting it on during a preferred activity (something the child really likes) or an activity that the child needs both hands for and therefore, the child won't be able to try and take off the mask (for example, on the swings).
- Gradually increase the types of activities (if teaching at home, increase to other activities at home and then leaving the home) that the child wears the mask for.
- The adult/family involved may want to wear a mask at the same time so the child isn't the only one doing it.
- Give lots of positive praise for wearing the mask, throughout this process and at the end of the time. If the positive praise isn't enough reinforcement to help make the child willing to work on it again, consider using something like a small toy or special activity as a reward for wearing a mask.
- If your child is more resistant, teaching wearing a mask may need to be taught more formally and broken down into smaller steps (i.e. first work on touching the mask, then holding it to the face, then putting it on, etc.). It's important to note, this can take time. For younger students and students with special needs, this can take even more time and should be worked on long before the student is expected to wear a mask out.